

# Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Tomorrow is the Fourth of July, on which, in America we celebrate Independence Day, recognizing the freedom that was divinely obtained in our country more than 200 years ago. It was actually on July 2, 1776, that the Second Continental Congress voted to separate from Great Britain by approving a Resolution of Independence proposed by Richard Lee of Virginia.

On July 3, future president John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail, “The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward, forever more.”

Adams’ prediction was off by two days because after passing the Resolution of Independence, Congress turned its attention to a completely separate document to explain the reasons for their Resolution, which would be called the Declaration of Independence, authored by a Committee of Five, with Thomas Jefferson as its chief contributor. Congress debated and revised the document, but eventually passed it on the Fourth of July, 1776. In actuality, most of the delegates signed the document on August 2, 1776.

God had His hand in the formation of this Republic. It was divine Providence that guided the Pilgrims to Massachusetts, who had fled from religious persecution. It was divine Wisdom that guided in the establishment of the principle of religious freedom as one of the hallmarks in this most unique political experiment, a country without a king; a church without a pope. The United States was birthed by divine design, to be the cradle of a society in which the principles of Christianity would be the nourishment. God’s blessing has rested in an immeasurable way upon America, giving unequalled prosperity and success. Does America recognize this fact as did her founding fathers?

Listen to the words of those delegates phrased in the Declaration of Independence itself: “When In the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a

decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” To think that the country they established would someday be teaching the doctrine of evolution in the public schools would have brought tears to the eyes of our Founding Fathers.

Listen to the words of President Abraham Lincoln decades later in his famous Gettysburg Address. After recounting the establishment of the United States, “conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all man are created equal,” he appealed, “that these dead shall not have died in vain--that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom--and that the government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

Today many of the principles of Christianity and religious liberty are being eroded. Just days ago, June 19 of 2010, in Dearborn, Michigan (the center of a very large Muslim population) three Christians were arrested for sharing their faith and handing out tracts to Muslims at the Arab International Festival, an event which attracts several hundred thousand Muslims each year. The City of Dearborn, perhaps bowing to political pressure, had banned the distribution of Christian literature near the Festival. On June 17, a three-judge panel from the 6<sup>th</sup> district Court of Appeals granted an emergency motion filed by pastor George Saieg, granting permission to distribute Christian literature.

Nevertheless, Dr. Nabeel Qureshi, David Woods and Paul Rezkalla were arrested for doing just that, witnessing to their Christian faith. Said eyewitness Steven Atkins, of Toronto, Canada, who was visiting the festival, “I never thought I would see this in America. It was an intense discussion, but it was not unruly. There was no threat of violence. It’s becoming more restrictive here than in Canada.”

We see the erosion of Bible Christianity as Scriptural lines of distinction are compromised at the altar of unity. The statement of Jesus, “That they may be one,” was never meant to accomplish unity under the guise of concession relating to the clear teachings of God’s Word.

At these events we should be neither surprised nor disheartened, for the Lord has given us an insight into the main features of the drama that is unfolding and will continue to unfold on this planet. He has graciously pulled the curtain aside, to give us sufficient information as to the conclusion, the successful conclusion of His plan here on earth. God does have a plan; you can be sure of that. This planet has not been left to spin at random. He made a perfect world, but man chose the path of sin. However, God stepped forward to make it right, paying for man’s sins by His own death on the cross. One day soon His plan will come to fulfillment. Soon the prayer of Jesus will be answered, “Thy kingdom come.” But it won’t happen without a violent struggle as the devil, the archrival of Christ, puts forth every effort to resist God’s design. Religious freedom will be at issue.

You and I have the privilege to be alive and observe these things which prophets of old saw only in vision and with the limitations of human language tried to describe. Often they saw the events only as they were encrypted in symbols; they watched as emblematic beasts (representing kingdoms and powers) battled it out for supremacy. John saw a ferocious beast arise, recorded in the first verses of Revelation 13 which, using the yardstick of biblical identification, students of prophecy dating back many centuries have identified as the church of the middle ages.

We recognize that God has people in every communion. But we also recognize that His Word brings to light certain facts. It reveals to us that Satan has been busy inducing well-intentioned men to lay aside the teachings of God's Holy Word and introduce human theories and substitutions. This should not surprise us, because it was religious people who put Jesus on the cross, not knowing what they were doing. Jesus said that the day would come when His followers would also be killed in the name of religious zeal. "The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service." John 16:2.

For many centuries Bible students have studied these prophetic symbols and arrived at consistent interpretations. Examining the symbols as given in the Bible and comparing them with identifying markers written by Daniel and other prophets, the Reformers concluded that the church of the middle ages met the prophetic specifications with remarkable accuracy. They discovered that the beast being given a "mouth speaking great things and blasphemies," was fulfilled by the claim of infallibility, by the claim to forgive sin and the authority to change God's Ten Commandments by the pontiffs of the Church of Rome. These are not new interpretations; they are centuries old, once championed by the Reformers but now discarded by most of Protestantism.

"It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them." It is estimated that somewhere between 50 and 100 million were martyred at the hands of the Papacy through wars, the rack, the stake and the Inquisition. History has recorded these sad chapters. But this ferocious and powerful entity, which persecuted dissenters throughout the centuries, demanding compliance upon pain of death, would itself suffer a set back, a "deadly wound" and experience its own captivity. This became reality when Pope Pius VI was taken captive at the hands of Napoleon's General Berthier in 1798. See Revelation 13:1-10.

Just prior to this, the voices of Christianity anticipated the coming set-back of this religious/political entity. In 1796 the Edinburgh "Missionary Magazine" contained an interesting article. "By the general consent of prophecy, the reign of Antichrist, is now hastening to an end. The aspect of providence, for some time past, has quickened our expectation of his fall."

That same year, George Bell wrote two articles in the London "Evangelical Magazine," in which he traced the rise of the first beast of Revelation 13 and boldly predicted its deadly wound. After adding up the prophetic clues he asserts, "If this be a right application of events to the prophecy, then Antichrist arose about the year 537, or at the farthest about the year 555. He continues 42

months, or 1260 prophetic days, that is 1260 years (Revelation 13:5); consequently we may expect his fall about the year 1797, or 1813.”

At the same time this first beast was descending into captivity, the Prophet John beheld another beast “coming up out of the earth.” Revelation 13:11. At first glance, this second beast appeared docile and pacific, having “two horns like a lamb.” Doubtless this second beast of Revelation 13 refers to none other than the United States, just arising at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, displaying Christian principles in its “lamb-like” horns, representing civil and religious liberty.

What do the “horns” symbolize? A horn represents “power” in prophecy and America has achieved its strength through the endorsement of the godly characteristic of freedom. Why are the horns described as being lamb-like? Because in the Bible, and most particularly the Book of Revelation (28 times in the last book of the Bible), the lamb is used to represent Christ. By building upon the twin freedoms of civil and religious liberty, liberties that spring from Christ Himself, America was fulfilling Revelation’s prophecy with remarkable clarity.

But like the twin towers of last decade, these twin principles are under attack today. Revelation’s prophecy continues by saying that this second beast will later speak the words of the dragon and echo, imitate, the modus operandi of the first beast of that chapter. Who is the dragon in prophecy? The dragon is identified as being the devil and Satan. Revelation 12:9. What has been one of his most effective tools? The application of force and coercion. This is how the church of the middle ages accomplished her goals.

As strange as it may seem (or not, given the inroads of intolerance toward Christianity), our country will one day repeal the principles of religious liberty and “speak as a dragon.” Do you think this is impossible? What happens when anarchy exists and people imbibe of a mob spirit? What happened in Toronto this last week? Few would claim that Canada was a “third world country,” and yet witness the violence and upheaval as protestors spoke by word and deed at the latest “G20 Summit.” Do you think that same kind of violence and anarchy won’t be present in our country? Do you think that when the time comes when America’s grocery shelves are left emptied by famine, pestilence, fuel shortages or who can predict what else, that people won’t react in a similar way? Are the people in Greece who are violently protesting the reduction or removal of their entitlements substantially any different than people who live on this side of the Atlantic?

In America we’ve been sheltered in a large way and have not personally experienced many of these things, but that is not to say that we are to be exempted forever. When law is removed by precept and example; when leaders flaunt their disregard for law by their own behavior; when pastors declare openly that God’s law has been removed, the door is open to lawlessness and anarchy. Few there would be today who could recognize the connection between the preaching that the Ten Commandments have been nullified and nailed to the cross, and the declension into civil lawlessness that our society now portrays, but the connection is clear and well established. When restraints are removed, the sinful heart of man is left to the control of the one who

invented the principles of lawlessness, Satan. His purpose has been to attack God's throne and His law from the very beginning.

These things will come; of that we can be certain. That means that we are a privileged society, living in the times in which prophets and angels desired to look. What a time to be alive! To think that everything in the Bible will soon come to pass and that before too long King Jesus will appear in the sky, what a blessed hope.

It means that there are "troubled times" ahead, because "travail" always precedes "delivery." But Jesus will be there to guide and protect us, if we surrender our lives and hearts to Him daily. It is incumbent upon us to grow in our faith through the constant study of His Word. "When the Son of man comes," asked Jesus after relating the story of the lady who wouldn't give up, "will He really find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8. How do we grow faith? "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17.

My friends, when the events of prophecy come to fulfillment, we are going to need a connection with Jesus that is living and constant. Information is valuable; knowing the prophecies is an advantage and knowing the teachings of the Bible indispensable. But these things, without a bond with Jesus that cannot be broken will avail nothing. The Jews of 2,000 years ago put Christ on the cross and then went home to "keep the Sabbath."

Knowing Jesus as a personal Friend and having a relationship with Him that will survive all manner of adverse conditions is what we need. We will need an experience in faith and trust that many today do not have. We need an assurance of His love that will survive if the heavens fall. We need the kind of faith that pressed the profession from Job's lips, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Job 13:15.

We need the kind of faith David spoke of when he wrote, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling." Psalm 48:1-3.

Are we prepared to "let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also" as confessed Martin Luther? Are we experiencing the freedom that Jesus came to give us; freedom from guilt from the past and freedom from the power of sin today? Jesus wants to purge from our hearts today every encumbrance, every deterrent to godly living. There is freedom when Jesus saves us from ourselves and habits that hold us back. There is freedom when we experience the "power of His resurrection" as He imparts living giving strength through His Spirit into our lives.

"If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth (not only the precepts of "truth" contained in biblical doctrines and teachings, but the One Who is the Truth) and the Truth shall make you free." John 8:32. It is knowing Jesus as a personal Friend that gives life meaning. Because we were born with sin-darkened minds, that can only happen if we let Him

into our hearts and spend time nourishing that relationship by the study of His Word and speaking to Him in prayer.

The Fourth of July is also known as Independence Day. The real “Independence Day,” the one that really matters, can come for you when Jesus sets you free from your past. You can enjoy freedom from guilt and the anxiety of fretting over past mistakes. He will take your sins away. He will bury them under the depths of the seas. You may be discouraged as you reflect on the misdeeds of yesterday, but Jesus wants you to be free from all of them. He has forgotten them and invites you to also let them go.

“Independence Day” can come for you as you allow Him to liberate you now from the sins that are dragging you down. Let His power overcome sin in your life. Jesus doesn’t know a sin He can’t forgive; a habit He can’t break. He wants to share His victory, His liberty with you. Walking in the safety of the “law of liberty,” the Ten Commandments, will impart the assurance that His Spirit is indeed at work in your life. Only God can give this liberty of obedience. Jesus came to “set the captives free.”

“Independence Day” will come when the sky splits open and Jesus with His angels comes to take us to the place He’s prepared, and we’ll be forever free from disease, death, doubts and disappointment. Our sleeping loved ones will be free of the chains of the grave and rise to glory. We’ll be forever free from the promptings of the tempter and free from a selfish nature that contends for supremacy.

The original Fourth of July (actually the Second of July, as we noted), was scheduled to be welcomed and commemorated by parades, pomp, bells and fireworks. What will it be when Jesus comes!